

My faith journey has evolved, as have I, but I do believe God called me here.

I was born a Congregationalist! I was baptized at my grandparents' church, a small Congregational church in East Providence that is no longer there. My parents were looking for a more active Sunday School program, and so we transferred to the church where I was for 66 years. This was the church where we were married, where our children were baptized, and where both my parents and my in-laws had their memorial services - and my in-laws weren't even members - they just liked the church!

My dad was an usher there and I can remember him, after seating newcomers, going to the pew where my mother was sitting to tell her in a stage whisper, "There are some visitors across the aisle; make sure you go over and meet them. Invite them to coffee hour." And of course, she did. Maybe that's why I enjoy ushering so much!

Over the 50 years of my adult life, my husband and I were on nearly every committee, which we gladly served as we felt it our responsibility.

Change is very hard for me, but when it's time, you know it, and now, here I am at Central. I like to think *God called me to be here*. Although I might not have recognized it at the time, I like to think I was needed here. (Clearly the Yard Sale and Membership Committees thought they needed me!)

We don't always know when we're being called by God, but we're all called upon to follow Jesus' example. I try to live my life that way, but I'm definitely a work in progress!

God's will isn't always immediately apparent. We'll see it, realize it, at a later time, maybe even years later.

In July of 2022, in the wake of Wayne's sudden death, my faith never wavered. I was sad, yes, but I wasn't angry. How do I see any sort of positive in his passing? I'm grateful that I didn't have to come home and find him, or that he wasn't driving a car when that happened.

The church rallied around me - me, who had joined Central less than a year before. There were cards, calls, texts. Friends brought desserts and dinners. Some even stayed to dine with us - a welcome respite from all that goes on at times like those. I'm thankful for the Social Committee who assisted with the collation. I'm grateful for the compassion shown by both ministers - from Rebecca driving from Little Compton to Rhode Island Hospital at 1:00 in the morning (she said there was no traffic at that hour and she was able to make it in a half hour!), to Claudia's daily hospital visits and bedside prayers, even as he was passing (the doctors and nurses had to wait until the "amen"). I will never forget that kindness and it meant the world to me. From meeting with Rebecca to plan the service, to Patrick's willingness to collaborate on the music with my son, who's also a church music director.

God called these fellow church members to lean in for support. I know it.

I believe in God's unconditional Grace.

God doesn't require anything of us; God's grace is just granted. God asks nothing in return. He offers Grace for everyone, but just like friends who reciprocate kindness toward one another, I always feel that I should do my best for God, even though it's not required.

As I said earlier, I DO try to follow Christ's example.

- I try to find a positive in the situation,
- I try to look for someone's best,
- I try to remember that it's not all about me.

Rebecca asked a question in her sermon on Sunday - why do I come to church? I come to church

- To be inspired by the sermon,
- To have direction in my life or validation of all I'm doing or trying to do,
- For the prayer of confession,
- For the music and hymns.

I love singing and I apologize in advance to those sitting in front of me!

In looking for this evening's hymns, I went into the cellar where I found two copies of the blue Pilgrim Hymnal. I chose one to take upstairs, and upon opening the front cover, found an inscription in my mother's handwriting. She had dedicated that hymnal to her grandchildren, my daughter and son. Listed inside were her favorite hymns, nearly two dozen of them, and her favorite Bible passage that I chose for tonight's scripture reading (Psalm 100).

Was that a gift from God? I have two copies of that hymnal, but this was the one I took off the shelf. It seems like God was calling to me.

I like to think we're all God's children. Migrants on a bus being met by protesters? All God's children. A daughter who changes to a different religion? Same big God. If I didn't think like this, I wouldn't be very Christian and I try to use that to live my life.

I'm not afraid to say any of this out loud. I'm not proselytizing, but I'm not at all ashamed of my faith.

My faith journey continues and it continues at Central. It's the Sunday morning Adult Sunday School. It's the Tuesday morning scripture group. And it's the beautiful, traditional service each week. But it's also what I learn from others, from you, that expands my thinking. I feel fortunate to be a member of such a wonderful congregation.

I know my faith grows stronger each week that I'm here, and I know it will continue to do so.

Yes, I do believe God called me here.

God is calling you.

God calls all of us.

God is still speaking.